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"Safeguarding What is
Important to Harford
County Citizens"

Press Release

HARFORD COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Office of the County Executive

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 30, 2012

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County Executive Craig Cites Reasons for Withdrawing Bill to Establish Fire and EMS Commission

Chides fire service leaders with playing politics with a public safety issue

(Bel Air, MD) - - Harford County Executive David R. Craig has announced plans to withdraw Harford County Bill No. 12-18 which is currently pending before the Harford County Council. The bill, if enacted, would have established in the Harford County Code a Harford County Fire and EMS Commission, an advisory body to examine fire and EMS related matters and provide recommendations to the County Executive regarding such issues.

County Executive Craig issued the following statement regarding his decision to withdraw the bill:

"As County Executive I have a responsibility to the citizens of Harford County to ensure that our public safety, fire and EMS services are provided to our citizens and that our emergency network system is properly prepared to answer calls for help.

During 2008 and 2009, we commissioned a study, in cooperation with the Harford County Volunteer Fire and EMS Association, of the county's all-volunteer fire and EMS service. The purpose of the "Fire Study" was to serve as a Master Plan in preparing our county and fire service to meet the growing demands for service.

One of the key recommendations from the Fire Study was to create a Fire and EMS Commission to serve as an advisory body to the County Executive. The Commission would review various fire and EMS related matters and make recommendations to the County Executive and Administration as to best practices that should be considered, as well as work to ensure that our volunteer fire and EMS service remains a viable organization for years to come.

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In February 2011, I established by Executive Order the Harford County Fire and EMS Commission to carry out the duties as prescribed in the Fire Study. At that time, the leadership and certain members of the fire service community took issue with the Commission and chose to fight the Administration on the need for the Commission.

Last month we moved forward to establish the Fire and EMS Commission into law and almost immediately came under criticism from some segments of the fire service and other elected officials for trying to do that which was recommended in the Fire Study. I find these actions to be ill-advised and without merit.

There are currently 12 other counties in the State of Maryland with a Fire Commission, including several of the “Big 7” counties.

Leaders of the Harford County Volunteer Fire and EMS Association have worked hard to defeat Harford County Bill No. 12-18, rather than work with the Administration to better serve the public’s interest. Why? The answer is quite clear – to preserve their own self-interests and a desire on the part of some to maintain the status quo. To me, the status quo of our fire and EMS service is unacceptable!

An advisory body such as the Harford County Fire and EMS Commission should not be a threat to anyone. Those who oppose such a Commission are not acting in the best interest of public safety, but rather political safety. Our taxpayers deserve better.

The days of county government standing on the sidelines with respect to public safety by simply writing a check to the Harford County Volunteer Fire and EMS Association and saying “good luck” are over! The Office of the County Executive and the County Council have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure there are benchmarks and performance measures in place for the fire and EMS service. This is no different than what we expect from other departments or agencies of County Government, the Sheriff’s Office or Board of Education.

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The issues unveiled in the Fire Study, including the subsequent 130 recommendations, are worthy of consideration and action by this Administration, the County Council and the Harford County Volunteer Fire and EMS Association. It is our responsibility to see that change is made, not in word but in deed.

In the near future I will outline my plans for moving forward to address the myriad of issues related to fire and EMS service and overall public safety in Harford County. We have an obligation to provide the best service possible to the citizens of Harford County and will take the necessary steps to move forward to address this matter and ensure adequate public safety measures are in place.”

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“Preserving Harford’s past; promoting Harford’s future”